

VZCZCXRO8462
PP RUEHPB
DE RUEHSV #0552/01 3321754
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281754Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0204
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1886
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1439
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0008
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0569
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0977
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000552

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI: PUBLIC CRITICISM OF IG BY RETIRED COLONEL;
POLICE PROBLEM? PRESIDENT IN AUSTRALIA; CABINET RESHUFFLE
UPDATE

REF: A. SUVA 543
[1](#)B. SUVA 536

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Prominent, retired Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Colonel Draunidalo this week publicly criticized recent interim government (IG) decisions affecting major ethnic-Fijian institutions, suggesting the decisions could "sow the seeds of irreparable damage." Some suggest Draunidalo was one of those who egged on the Speight coup in [1](#)2000. He had been quiet for the past year. A split may be forming within the Fiji Police, now led by former RFMF Chief of Staff Teleni. A leading IG "anti-corruption" figure, Nasir Ali, seems at the center of the police controversy. President Iloilo is in Australia for a medical check-up. Interim PM Bainimarama's cabinet re-shuffle remains pending, though there are signs his own mix of portfolios will shift, adding Fijian Affairs and the public service and shifting off home affairs. End summary.

Retired RFMF Colonel criticizes IG

[1](#)2. (U) Savenaca Draunidalo, former RFMF Colonel and former minister in the deposed Qarase government, was chief guest for the Ratu Sukuna Memorial School (RSMS) prize-giving ceremony on Nov. 28. RSMS has significant numbers of students who are children of RFMF personnel. In a bluntly worded address, Draunidalo criticized recent IG decisions that suspended the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), downgraded the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, and changed functions of the Native Lands Trust Board. Draunidalo noted that high chief Ratu Sukuna was instrumental in creating all three institutions. Draunidalo acknowledged that the IG changes are "probably well meaning," but "this is totally foreign and has the potential to sow seeds of irreparable damage to the well-being of the people of this country." Draunidalo also queried "the haste" with which the IG has made such changes.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: At the time of the Speight coup in 2000, Draunidalo reportedly was one of the behind-the-scenes orchestrators who only backed out at the last minute. In recent months, rumors have been rife. Some have been convinced he is a non-visible participant in the Military Council advising Bainimarama. Others have the impression he is plotting behind the scenes to remove the IG. The RSMS speech suggests the latter impression may be closer to the truth. So far IG spokesmen have not responded in public, but there must be consternation when such a prominent "military

man" makes such an open attack. Until this week, Draunidalo had been very quiet ever since the coup. His only publicity has been a DUI charge from last summer that he has been fighting in court.

Fissure opening in the police?

¶4. (C) Early this week, media reported that Deputy Police Commissioner Antonio had confiscated the official vehicle of Nasir Ali, Assistant Commissioner Crime. Antonio confirmed that had happened, but he refused to explain why. Qarase's Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes had suspended Nasir Ali for alleged corruption. After the coup, Bainimarama, amazingly, named Ali to be initial head of the anti-corruption drive. He conducted a series of well-publicized raids that seemed much more splash than substance. Eventually Ali transferred back to the police, taking a four-rank upgrade to the AC Crime job. Not long after, Bainimarama's first Police Commissioner, Jimmy Koroi, wrote a letter to current IG Police Commissioner Teleni urging that Ali not be allowed to investigate a police credit union scandal since Ali appears to be implicated. Teleni then expressed full confidence in Ali and let him oversee the investigation. Just lately, another senior police officer, out of the chain of command, has been assigned to oversee Ali's work. On Nov. 28, Teleni told the media Ali's issue is "insignificant" and is an "internal matter."

President Iloilo in Australia for check-up

¶5. (C) Aged and ailing President Iloilo traveled to Australia last weekend for a routine medical check-up that was postponed last April when the GCC declined to appoint the

SUVA 00000552 002 OF 002

IG's choice of Ratu Epeli Nailatikau to be Vice President. The IG subsequently suspended the GCC and is preparing a promulgation for a new-look replacement body, presumably one that the IG will be able to control. Interim Fijian Affairs Minister Ganilau said this week that, contrary to rumor, the IG will not just appoint a new VP. That must await a blessing by a reconstituted GCC in the new year. In the meantime, the VP office remains vacant and nobody has been named as Acting President in Iloilo's absence. Media report that last week the President's office flatly denied any overseas trip was in the works, leading media to speculate that the "sudden" travel must reflect an emergency. Actually, the Aussies tell us Iloilo's visa request arrived a month beforehand, and all indications are that the trip is as routine as a medical check-up can be for an 86-year-old. Per previous reporting, Iloilo suffers from dementia.

Cabinet re-shuffle still pending

¶6. (C) The IG ministerial re-shuffle signaled in last week's budget speech (ref B) has not yet occurred. After Qarase and other prominent ethnic-Fijians decried a mention in budget documents that Fijian Affairs would become a department rather than a ministry, Bainimarama told the media he intends to add that responsibility to his own portfolio; and, despite the change of designation, it would not be a downgrade. Bainimarama also appears to be adding the "public service" to his portfolio, though his current responsibility for home affairs (military, police, immigration) may shift to another interim minister. The RFMF spokesman has said the Military Council decided on the re-shuffle, but all indications are that Bainimarama, himself, is the man.
DINGER